

Podcast – Season 2 – Sarah Crane

Season Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Centenary Development Enabler for Baptists Together
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we are the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 2 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet is a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. We are trying to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	In this second season, we will introduce you to some of the women who have taken part in the project and the research they have done.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with the findings of the project which can be found on the Project Violet website.

Interview – Sarah Crane

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Helen and Sarah	<p>Helen Cameron Today I'm speaking with Sarah Crane. Welcome to the Project Violet podcast, Sarah.</p> <p>Sarah Crane Thank you.</p> <p>Helen Cameron Perhaps you could start by explaining what your current ministry role is.</p> <p>Sarah Crane So I am the head of chaplaincy at Milton Keynes University Hospital. And as part of that, we also cover our local hospice and a local mental health unit.</p> <p>Helen Cameron Wow, that already sounds like quite a big job. For people who haven't come across a hospital chaplain, could you just say briefly what they do?</p> <p>Sarah Crane Well, in one sense, it's really simple. We spend our time talking to people around the hospital – patients, families, staff. I think the training that someone like me brings means that they're comfortable discussing with a chaplain the deep things of life, comfortable with the existential struggle. It's being comfortable</p>

with pain and suffering in a way that actually the health system is not very comfortable with, with the system seeking to fix people. And that's quite a natural thing and healthcare, in most cultures, does that actually. But chaplains come alongside people to help give them space to process their experiences, and hopefully, as a trained listener, a trained pastoral carer, to be able to be an accompanier, in making sense of those things. And then acknowledging that lots of things don't make sense to us from a human perspective.

Helen Cameron

Thank you for that. And so your role is as team leader of the chaplains in the hospital. Can you just explain a bit about what that involves?

Sarah Crane

Well, in one sense, it means that I have to take responsibility for everything, which has its moments, I guess! What it means is I get the joy of seeing the team grow. And I've been able to appoint people and see them progress and develop and develop beyond their roles here. And that's wonderful. It means that, in a way, I guess, what people imagine perhaps hospital chaplains do is that we spend all day out on a ward visiting patients. And that is a part of our job. But for me, it's quite a small part of my job, because I also sort out contracts, I'm sorting out financial stuff, I'm sorting out the management of the team. So I've got three paid staff. But then I've got three other chaplains that support our wider team. I've got two Roman Catholic priests. I've got 14 volunteers. And I have to manage all of those people. I also manage the training that we offer, and how we help people in the hospital understand our role. But also, all the time I've been here – I've been here 10 years this year – and partly because of stuff I've done in the past, I've had a real interest in supporting staff. And so I lead all the debriefing in the Trust that helps people to process the psychological impact of incidents, and do lots of what people might consider soft stuff that hopefully builds a positive culture and encourages people to seek support. And I just hope it creates space for people to be open and honest about who they are. And then as a manager, there's all those inevitable meetings that are sometimes a joy, and sometimes quite tedious, as any job can be.

Helen Cameron

Thank you for that. And it's just really interesting to hear your role in building a positive culture. That sounds like a positive thing to do as part of ministry. Perhaps not very tangible. But that's a really interesting thing you've highlighted there.

Sarah Crane

Yeah, I mean, I, I think as a chaplain, we have a unique power. And part of the power is partly about role. I mean, at this point, I'm a senior member of staff. But I wasn't when I started. But also it's being able to encourage people to do the right thing, being able to encourage people to look after each other. And that's partly because I believe in the values of love and kindness. But even if you look at it from a hard financial perspective, we know that people are able to do more if they feel supported, and actually in healthcare, there's some brilliant research around the impact on mortality of incivility between staff. So, there's a brilliant campaign called 'civility saves lives'. And the evidence is that where people are dealing with incivility within teams, more patients die. And so I think

it's a win-win for a positive healthcare culture. And I think it's something chaplains should be at the heart of because whatever faith or belief community a healthcare Chaplain might come from, it really links with our values of our profession.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. That's really enriching to hear that. I'm wondering now if I can take you back to the beginning of your ministry and ask you about how you came to be a Baptist minister.

Sarah Crane

Well, I suppose, in some ways by accident, because it wasn't something I had considered. And it was something that the Minister of my home church, Clive Jarvis really encouraged me about when I basically told him he was being ridiculous. So I hope he listens to this because he laughs at me about this. After I was at school, I went to Spurgeon's College, to do their theology degree one day a week because that was what interested me. And I worked part time for my local church. And I did a couple of other jobs to have a bit of money to afford to live simply with my mum and dad. But as time went on, I felt that I was actually being a bit disobedient. And I was quite keen to become a primary school teacher. And I was about to apply to do that, as I was coming up to kind of nearly the last year of my degree. And I was at the ordination of a friend, and someone was reading from John 21, you know, where Jesus says to feed my sheep. And I felt and I haven't felt this pain many times in my life, I really felt kind of pricked by that and thinking, Yeah, I'm not doing what I'm gifted to do. I'm trying to do something that feels safe and comfortable, something really hard, but something that feels like what had been a plan all along. And I thought, I'm going to have to, I'm going to have to do this. So I explored that and was able then to kind of enter ordained ministry quite slowly, by going to be Minister in a church in Southend, in a team, and then kind of going back and filling in the gaps and being ordained several years later.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. That's a really fascinating journey. And, yeah, there's so many different routes, the different women who've spoken to me of how to enter ministry. So thank you for sharing that. Now, you got involved in the second group of women who came on board as co-researchers in Project Violet. I'm wondering whether you could just say, what was the question or issue you looked at?

Sarah Crane

So I spent four years in a local church and ministry. And then I have now spent nearly 10 years, which seems ridiculous, in an acute hospital, also serving a hospice and mental health unit. And I was wondering what other women's experiences were of the difference between the two, and of how they'd felt in those cultures in terms of being encouraged, being able to grow and being valued for themselves? Because in one sense, the NHS is an enormously equality-aware culture. I mean, there's lots of discrimination – we know that in the research, as well as people in the numbers, as well as people's experiences. But I just wondered what that was like for other female ministers. And I was just curious about it and really wanted to listen to those stories.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. So how did you actually go about conducting your research then?

Sarah Crane

So I sort of put a plea out into Facebook. And I then arranged meetings, and recorded and just listened to people. I didn't have a set of questions I was asking people, and it was anonymized. So they're not identified. But I wanted to know what their experiences have been. And I was keen to speak to people who'd gone in both directions. So people that had both gone from church into chaplaincy, and stayed there, but also people that have gone back. And to kind of hear what the processes of discernment were, perhaps for them, as well as what the joys were and what the kind of where the friction places weren't for you like.

Helen Cameron

So really, it was a series of interviews, listening conversations, I guess, drawing on your skills as a chaplain and deep listening to people, and then trying to pull together themes from the stories that people offered you.

Sarah Crane

Yes and as always, the thing, one of the main things I took away was that everyone's different, and that people's experiences are rich. But there were definite themes between these women of kind of feeling underestimated or feeling undervalued, or just little physical things of not having the opportunities that male counterparts had had in in different contexts. And I, you know, I felt conscious that that a lot of women feel 'it's me'. And the thread for me was everyone was saying that in a similar way, you know, 'I felt different in this context, but I wondered if there was something about me', and, you know, to me listening to those conversations, I want to say no, it's not about you. It's, it's about a deeply ingrained sense of who belongs and who gets to be here.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. So you've given us a flavour of your report, why would you like people to go away now and read it?

Sarah Crane

Well, I mean, I think because it's part of the whole of Project Violet in terms of what could life look like, for Baptists, women ministers, in a way that I think is quite a joy to imagine. I think it would give people a flavour of these experiences that people have had. And some of these things that, as I said, just really stood out to me as the person listening to each of these people as being real realities, and is that what we want? I suppose discrimination exists in every place in the whole world, doesn't it? But if it's unconscious, I'd really challenge people to reflect on whether they can become conscious of it. What can we do about it? Because we all have preferences. We all have things within us that create sort of a natural bias towards things that are more like ourselves. But sometimes we have to live with the discomfort of hearing about other people's difficult experiences.

	<p>Helen Cameron Thank you. Well, thanks very much for talking to us about your research and thanks for coming on to the Project Violet podcast.</p> <p>Sarah Crane It's a pleasure. I'm very excited to see what happens next.</p>
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Season Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast. We invite you to go to the website and download the reports if you have not yet done so. www.projectviolet.org.uk
Jane	And don't forget to tell others about the Project Violet podcast. You can follow us on Facebook and X formerly Twitter.
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